

TAHOE

QUARTERLY

by STEVEN ING

EYE TO EYE QUEENQUEEN OF FRESH

In five short years, Lisa's Organics has established a region-wide following among food-lovers. Beginning with a home delivery service in North Tahoe, then through her stores in Truckee and Reno, people have come to rely on Lisa Boudreau, age 34, for quality and variety of produce, and increasingly, other food products.

How did you get involved in organic food sales?

I went to school at Rochester Institute of Technology, New York, where I met my husband, Mark, who has a degree in food management. I got a degree in food marketing and distribution, and my very first job as an intern involved selling produce, which I fell in love with. I didn't know anything about organic produce until, after school, Mark and I moved to Boulder, Colorado, where I went to work for the Wild Oats chain as a part-time stocker. I moved up to assistant manager, manager and then regional manager. Then we relocated to Los Angeles, where I had a great job working for the country's leading organic distributor and I developed all my connections with the growers. Mark got a job with Trader Joe's as a senior buyer, so we had to move back east. I began brokering produce for chain stores out of the house. When we moved here, we worked out of the house again, brokering nationally, with no intention of starting anything locally. But we found that Fridays were slow in the business, so we started a home delivery company, Lisa's Organics, five years ago. But home delivery was hard without having a storefront and all of our customers were asking us why we

didn't open a store.

So that's when you opened Lisa's Central Market in Truckee?

Yes, and the community was immediately supportive. We have a lot of Bay Area people shop here when they're at their second homes in Truckee. They're delighted to find the same foods, often at a lower price. We also service about 5 to 25 local restaurants – especially on seasonal items like heirloom varieties of vegetables.

People were very surprised when your newly opened Reno store closed this September. Did you not find the same support there?

Oh, we did! But our landlord didn't give us the cooperation we needed to make the location into what we wanted. We wanted to open up a wall facing the corner to give ourselves exposure to drive-by traffic. The space was also larger than we'd originally wanted, and we were never able to renegotiate the lease. We've also doubled the size of our Truckee store, which wasn't part of our business plan. But we're now looking for capital investment and hope to reopen in Reno soon.

Do you see yourself as part of a growing, organic revolution in food?

Well, our buying philosophy is organic for a number of reasons, and partly just as a result of us working for chains like Wild Oats and Trader Joe's (TJ's). Our first experience with organic was like that of many people: We walked into an organic market with \$100 in our pockets and saw a box of cereal for \$6, and we didn't buy anything. But after Mark's direct buying experience with

TJ's and my experience with the produce wholesalers, it was a natural to go organic. Our whole goal is to have organics at great values... and from sustainable agriculture. That's why we have this theme in our décor and music that goes back to the 1920s to 1940s: the days before World War II, when food was produced without all the chemicals and the focus was on whole foods. All of our food is certified as organic, with the exception of the fish and the water, which have no certification process. Less than one percent of this regional market is organic, but it's growing each year.

There's a general perception that organic food is expensive. How much does it add to a food budget to shop organic?

The average is about a ten percent increase. But if people compare apples to apples, so to speak, and don't compare one great loaf of bread to a not-so-great loaf, then people shopping at our store will get organic for about five percent more than what they'd pay otherwise.

Where does most of your produce come from?

We don't use that many Nevada producers, but would like to use more. A lot of our peppers and tomatoes come from farms only an hour or two west of Truckee. Probably 30 percent of our vegetables come from the greater Sacramento area. The rest is from the Salinas-Watsonville area.

What other special services do you offer besides home delivery?

For \$4.99, we'll do your shopping for you, when you phone in your order. You can pay in advance with a credit card or pay when you pick it up. Also, you can contact us for shopping or products at www.lisascentralmarket.com.

On October 24th, Lisa's Organics in Truckee will host a second anniversary party at its downtown location, right by the roundabout, 10418 Donner Pass Road. 